Public access description

The illustrations in this obstetrical book by Jacobus Rueff show scenes of childbirth in 16th-century Europe. Some, like the expectant mother’s visit to the midwife and the use of a birthing chair and surgical instruments, are still familiar today. Other ideas are of much less importance than they once were, notably the practice of casting the child’s horoscope at the moment of birth. The book has a text of 184 pages. The illustrated title page shows a birthing chamber with the mother and her attendants, the baby being washed, another child with the cradle, and people celebrating.

Descriptive line
Illustrated obstetrics book ‘De Conceptu, et Generatione Hominis’ by Jacobus Rueff published in Germany in 1587

Physical description
Obstetrical book ‘De Conceptu et Generatione Hominis’ by Jacobus Rueff, published by P Fabricius for S Feyrabend, Frankfurt am Maine, 1587. The book, which has been leather-bound at a later date, has an illustrated title page, dedication to the Elector of Brandenburg, list of contents, exhortation to the reader, and text of 184 pages (numbered 1-92 alternately), some illustrated with woodcuts. The illustrations include a birthing chamber with the mother and her attendants using a birthing chair while astrologers plot the child’s birthchart (pp3,26); a woman’s reproductive anatomy (pp10-12); the expectant mother visiting the midwife (p 17); the birthing chair devised by Rueff (p 18); obstetrical instruments (pp 24-25); a birthing chamber showing the mother and her attendants, the baby being washed, another child with the cradle, and people celebrating (title page and p 34); abnormalities such as siamese twins, children with animal heads, children with missing limbs (pp38-reverse of 47).

Dimensions
Height: 19.4 cm, Width: 14.4 cm closed, Depth: 2.2 cm

Museum number
B.450-1994

Object history note
The book had to be read aloud at every birth a Zurich midwife attended.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O38440/de-conceptu-et-generatione-hominis-book-rueff-jacobus/